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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000821

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL SOCI KIRF LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ISRAELITE COMMUNAL COUNCIL BOARD OBTAINS GOL'S RECOGNITION

¶1. (U) On May 15, the Israeli Communal Council obtained the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) official recognition of its newly elected board. The Board was elected on February 28 for a six-year term, but the MOI had delayed giving the Council its validation. Due to the difficulties in obtaining the MOI's validation every three years, the Council elected its board for a six-year term instead of its usual three-year term.

¶2. (SBU) On April 16, Isaac Arazi, newly elected chairman of the Council, and Semari Behar, board secretary, informed us about the MOI's delay in granting approval and requested Embassy assistance. According to Arazi the MOI's approval is necessary for the Council to manage and run its finances as well as the properties of the Jewish community living in Lebanon. Embstaff then met with Minister of Interior Hassan Sabaa to intervene on the Council's behalf and encourage the MOI to complete the validation process, which it did on May 15.

¶3. (U) The Israeli Communal Council was established in the 1920s. The council manages the finances and properties owned by the Jewish Lebanese community. Additionally, it manages several synagogues located in Beirut, Bhamdoun, and Aley, and the Jewish cemetery in Beirut. According to Arazi, there are approximately 100 Lebanese Jews currently living in Lebanon. (Note: The voters' registration list of 2005 shows that there are approximately 6,000 Jewish voters in Lebanon. End note.)

The council also is preparing to renovate the synagogue located in downtown Beirut with funding provided by the Jewish Lebanese and a small amount from Solidere, a Beirut downtown real estate development company.

COMMENT

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¶4. (SBU) This is not the first time that the Council has faced such difficulties with the MOI. With every election, Post is approached by the Council with a request for assistance in expediting the validation process. Post twice helped the council on when previous boards were elected in 2002 and 2005. End Comment.

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